

from of Rev. Mr. C. to E. Putnam.  
In what Sense the Heart

Deceitful and Wicke

A

# DISCOURSE

FROM

JEREMIAH XVII. 9.  
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JEREMIAH XVII. 9.

*The heart is deceitful above all things,  
and desperately wicked, who can  
know it ?*

**N**O person can perform a proper part in the sight of heaven, unless the principles from which he acts are agreeable to reason and the laws of God. The human mind must be rightly informed, and the affections placed on suitable objects previous to our exhibiting that temper and conduct which are necessary to advance us to our proper happiness. It is too plain to admit of any dispute, that the felicity of a future state has no small dependence on the regularity of the mind : and therefore it is of great importance that beings, who are placed in a state of trial in order to prepare for that important scene of action, should have a competent knowledge of the heart. But the words of the prophet, which are the foundation of the following discourse, seem ( in the letter of them ) to forbid



bid this necessary knowledge of the state of the mind. We will therefore attempt to form just sentiments on this point in the following manner.

In the *First* place, we will endeavour to state the sense and meaning of our text, by consulting the drift of the context.

*Secondly*, We will further confirm the sense of it by shewing its analogy to other parts of revelation ; and its agreeableness to our most refined sentiments of pure religion.

*Thirdly*, Such considerations will be suggested as may have a rational tendency to direct us to a right application of the subject.

*First*, We will endeavour to construe our text by consulting its connection with the context. The prophet *Jeremiah* was employed by heaven to attempt the reduction of the *Israelites* from idolatry and other enormous vices, by the perpetration of which they had rendered themselves uncommonly infamous. It would be foreign to our present purpose to enumerate all the instances of their misconduct. This article only demands our present Reflection,



tion, That they were in general a generation of men who had discarded all proper allegiance to that Being with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning, and placed their dependance for future preservation on their fellow mortals, equally frail and imperfect with themselves. Of this we may be fully convinced by considering the four verses immediately preceding our text, which are thus : *Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched lands in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.* The words of our text immediately ensue. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it ?* The intent of the prophet seems to be plainly this : God Almighty is the most suitable object for trust and confidence ; wicked,  
deceitful

*deceitful* man is unworthy of it in manifold instances. But notwithstanding this, you irrational *Israelites* act such a strange part as to prefer the creature to the Creator : these your human assistants are *deceitful and wicked*, and *who* of you *can know their hearts* or the intent of their minds. Although they, for the present, may appear as men of the strictest honour and integrity, yet you have no proper security that their future deportment shall be of a piece with their present characters. You can have no certain intelligence of the true state of their minds. This is peculiar to Omniscience, as we find in that divine assertion immediately succeeding our text. *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* Which expressions naturally suggest to us these sentiments, That the knowledge of the supreme Being is far from being confined and contracted as ours : he can discern the most latent designs of the human mind, and at once discover the propriety or impropriety of those principles which are the source of human actions, while this discovery falls not within the verge of our power ; from which we fairly conclude, that to make *flesh*  
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*our arm or trust in deceitful wicked man*, whose heart cannot be known by us, is equally an argument of weakness and impiety.

From this brief view of our text as it stands related to the context, we may be exempted from the charge of groundless interpolation, if we read it thus, *the heart* of another person *is* to me *deceitful and desperately wicked*, and it is beyond my power to obtain such an intelligence of it, as to render it safe for me to repose therein that confidence, with regard to my future preservation, which I may do, with the utmost safety, in the supreme Being.

But that we may have all the moral certainty that can be obtained in the present case that this is, in truth, the sense of our text, we will proceed ( as was proposed in the *second place* ) to offer some evidences in favour of it from the united voice of scripture and reason. It will undoubtedly be allowed on all hands, that by *the heart* is intended the noblest ingredients of the human constitution; even those faculties we find we are possessed of, and by which we are enabled to reason and reflect, to choose or refuse any object presented to us; and consequently



quently *the knowledge* of the heart can intend no other than this ; that we are conscious to ourselves of being possessed of these properties and also sensible of the various motives which induce us to perform our manifold actions. Now to assert, that we cannot determine from what principles we act, is manifestly absurd. Who will undertake to maintain that the religious votary is insensible of the motives which influence him to exhibit his Acts of Homage and obedience ? Who can with any reason pretend that the thief can't ascertain the grounds upon which he bears away his neighbour's substance ? The uncharitable, ungenerous person, the causes of his stingy inhuman conduct ? Or the liar the reasons for which he deviates from the truth ? To deny man this power is to admit such degrees of human impotency as are directly repugnant to common sense. Could man arrive to no competent knowledge of the state of his own mind, that direction of *Solomon* must be vain and impertinent, *Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.* The plain meaning of which is this : Let it be the ambition of every one critically to inspect the various passions and affections of the human  
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mind, and endeavour to place them on proper objects, and exert them into action, when convenient opportunity presents, for hereupon rational felicity is founded ; but it is impossible any one can act in this form prescribed by *Solomon*, without having a competent knowledge of his own heart, unless we admit that a man can have a just intelligence of the properties of the Soul, and at the same time have no conception of the soul itself, which is absurd.

It is a first principle, that the generous parent of the universe, and its inhabitants, should be *heartily* affected and admired by his intelligent *off-spring* ; but if we *cannot know our hearts*, then it is impossible to determine, whether we exhibit this affection or not, and of consequence we are left at the utmost uncertainty, with respect to the discharge of an important branch, both of natural and revealed religion. Again, as we are favoured with christianity, it is requisite that we examine the evidences advanced for its support ; but this can never be effected by us, unless the powers of the mind be exerted, which is impossible unless we have some knowledge of them :

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*with the heart* ( St. Paul observes ) *a man believeth unto righteousness ; but it is difficult to conceive how any one can believe with the heart, unless he has a knowledge of it.*

These are some of the many reasons, that might be assigned, to evince the propriety of not receiving our text as containing any such doctrine as this, that no person can know his own heart ; whereas there is no manner of impropriety in supposing our text true, with regard to another person's *heart* being *deceitful and desperately wicked*, and not to be perfectly known by us. St. Paul's words are very expresse to this purpose, as they are found written in 1 Cor. ii. 11. *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him.* And if we will allow one part of *Jeremiah's* prophecy to prove another, we may find several passages very pertinent to our present purpose ; the words relate to the same sett of men, to which we suppose our text has reference, they are found, chap. ix. ver. 4, 5, 8. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother : for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they*



*they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity : their tongue is as an arrow shot out, it speaketh deceit : one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in his heart he layeth wait for him. It is a plain case, that mankind may perform actions good in themselves, and such as may appear to the observers, as the genuine product of upright minds, when at the same time, they derive their original from deceitful treacherous hearts. A man's outward behaviour may not only be unblameable, but very commendable by us, while the principles and motives which are the springs of his action, may be utterly wrong and unjustifiable. These are they who, in sacred Dialect make clean the outside, while inwardly they are full of uncleanness.*

We now proceed in the third place to suggest such considerations as may serve for a right application of this subject. Accordingly,

In the first place we infer, that if the heart of another person, may be to us *deceitful and desperately wicked*, and cannot be absolutely known,

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known, then it is an instance of vanity and arrogance in us, to pretend to an infallible cognizance of the same. It answers all the purposes of good living with respect to us, if a neighbour exhibits the fruits of righteousness : such a character demands our most charitable, affectionate regards. As to the state of the mind, it becomes us to acquiesce in this, that *to his own celestial master, every one standeth or falleth*. That therefore we ought to judge *nothing* of this sort *before the time*, but commit the judgment entirely to him, before whose intuitive mind, the most secret recesses of the heart are manifest : even to him, by whose impartial inquest, *the heart and reins* of every individual are to be examined, and rewards or punishments dispensed, according to their integrity.

Again : we learn from this text, never to repose that confidence in man, which is due to GOD alone. The best of the human race, are liable to deception and vice, and so far as we place any undue confidence in them, so far we are in danger of being misled. Indeed considering our situation in the present state, it is undeniably true, that we are necessitated  
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to *trust* in our fellow men, for a very great part of our temporal felicity ; but our *trust* favours of impiety, when we imagine it to be in their power to confer a happiness adequate to our natures. While there be many that say, *who will shew us any good ?* while many are mistaken in their notions of true felicity, and many others rely upon improper objects for the conferment of it ; let us, with a christian fervour of mind, adopt that excellent language, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us : this shall put gladness in our hearts, more than the time wherein their corn and their wine were increased.* Man in his best estate is infirm and unstable ; often unable, and oftener unwilling to supply the wants of the necessitous. But *in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength*, and his tender mercies are displayed to all his works. *He is the confidence of the ends of the earth*, and causes none to be ashamed, who rationally place their confidence in him.

Moreover. We learn from this subject ; that if the *hearts* of other persons are to us *deceitful, and desperately wicked*, and the exact understanding of their intent exceeds the limits

mits of our knowledge, then it will follow, that our *hearts* in their view, may be of the same character. Our minds may be *deceitful and wicked* to our neighbours, as well as their's be so to us. We can't therefore suitably improve the present subject, unless every one of us diligently examine the state of our own minds, and rectify the disorders of the same. This important business cannot be too soon begun, or too intensely pursued. But alas ! although there is nothing of greater importance, yet there is nothing more universally neglected. There is no doubt, but that through the variety of our vitious indulgencies, the state of our minds is very different ; some of us are more inured to wickedness than others, and we are all hereby more or less depraved : but yet it is rationally presumed, that none of us are *so desperately wicked*, as to be beyond the possibility of reformation, through the influence of rational evangelical motives. All vice and irregularity in mankind, take their rise from the *heart* ; therefore our blessed saviour observes, *Matt. xv. 19. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man.* The  
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desires and inclinations of the human mind when consented to by the will, and exerted into action, become criminal, and consequently expose the transgressor to punishment ; while transient desires after forbidden objects, in their first rise and origin are not evil ; for inclination to vice, or desires after unworthy, inglorious objects, are necessary ingredients in the constitution of beings placed in a state of trial. Accordingly, the first human pair (who are generally supposed to be better as to their make and constitution than any of their numerous progeny, even they) were liable to transgress, and were actually inclined to forbidden objects, before their unhappy apostacy ; or else we can't consistently solve that unfortunate occurrence of their listening so readily to the suggestions of the tempter. Were there nothing but what we commonly denominate pure rational desires or inclinations in the human mind, we should perform right action through necessity, which is neither virtuous or rewardable. These things being premised, it may be proper for us to consider, that although we find upon examination, that our hearts are *fully set in us to do wickedly*, yet we are not to imagine, that the laws of reason  
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or christianity oblige their votaries to suppress; entirely, all propensity to evil which they experience in themselves ; for this would be to require the destruction of an essential part of the human constitution. This is our duty, ever to consider the will as the commanding faculty of the soul, and that no desire or inclination in men, will be imputed to them as criminal, unless vilified by the sanction of their free consent. The art of regulating, or rather retrieving our minds from that *deceitful* and *wicked* state we find them to be in, must consist in this, *viz.* whatever sentiments arise in our minds, either from the force of imagination, or the presentment of objects to our senses, must be immediately examined, and either cherished or rejected, as they are found to be conducive, either to good or evil. Upon this plan, let the very worst of us seriously consider whether, when we are accosted with any temptation, we find therein such a compulsive power as offers violence to our wills, and causes us to hearken to it irresistibly. Do we not rather find through the influence of evangelical motives, that it is in our power to comply with, or reject the same ? If we resist the temptation to dishonourable action, we act a  
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proper part ; whereas if we proceed to the gratification of our desires, we immediately commence actual sinners. It is this course of behaviour, that vitiates, perverts, or depraves the mind, and so causes us to sink into the class of those unhappy mortals, who are *desperately wicked*. According to that gradual proceſſion, recorded by St. James, chap. i. ver. 14, 15. *Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own luſts and enticed. Then, when luſt has conceived, it bringeth forth ſin ; and ſin when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth death. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own luſts and enticed.* This enticement is requiſite, in order to make proof of the virtue and integrity of the probationer ; excluſive of ſuch trial, the mind (which is the ſeat of felicity) cannot be good. The iniquity follows : *then, when luſt has conceived, it bringeth forth ſin ;* i. e. when any deſire after inglorious objects is cheriſhed and retained, when the diſjointed parts, when the luſts in embryo are cordially conſented to, then ſin, or a tranſgreſſion of law enſues. *And ſin when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth death :* i. e. inevitable puniſhment is the juſt deſert of it, and **nothing ſhort of the moſt ſincere repentance**



and reformation can prevent it's being the certain consequence. When we find ourselves inclined to any thing which our own consciences inform us is destructive of our happiness, we shall do well to have immediate recourse to any diverting or profitable reflections, which may have a tendency to subdue, in a good degree, all irregular sallies of appetite and passion. Common experience confirms us in this sentiment, that whatever object we esteem, and principally desire, the same has the chief room in our affections. The worldling, (for instance,) finds no difficulty in keeping his mind stedfastly engaged on the most likely methods to enhance his earthly inheritance. The voluptuary, can with ease, contemplate upon those unwarrantable steps which are usually prosecuted to obtain sensual pleasure and delight. And the case would be much the same, did mankind exercise the like zeal and attention with regard to religion: Did we suitably reflect on the unrivalled charms of pure and undefiled religion: Did we cherish in our minds, a just sense of the necessity of acquiring the peculiar favour of the deity, by maintaining a good conscience, and advancing in the paths of righteousness, we might instantly observe

observe a happy reformation of the *mind*: for *where the treasure is, there also the heart will be.*

Upon the whole. We observe, that although the heart of another person cannot be certainly and indisputably known by us, yet that every one may obtain a competent knowledge with regard to himself. If therefore notwithstanding this capacity for the discernment of our internal state, we either deny that we have it, or unreasonably refuse to improve it, we must be of all men the most miserable. *Let not a deceived heart turn us aside.* Every wilful neglect of power is peculiarly noticed by that being with whom we have to do. *He that planted the ear shall he not hear? He that formed the eye shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge shall he not know?* May the sincerity and integrity of the psalmist be suitably regarded by every one of us, as it is expressed in *Psalm cxxxix.* verses 23, and 24. *Search me O GOD and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* q. d. I have diligently examin'd into the state of my own mind, and have endeavoured

deavoured to use my rational faculties to advance me to the temper and deportment required by the equitable rules of thy moral government: But lest I may have been too partial or remiss, do thou, who hast the hearts of all men in thine hands, search me also, and by the kind assistance of thy good spirit discover to my apprehension any thing that may yet be irregular; and conduct me in that course of obedience which may terminate in unending felicity. Let this excellent example be duly considered by us ; and hereby may we be reminded of that communication which the supreme Being undoubtedly has with the human mind ; and the absolute necessity of our soliciting for the kind concurrence of heaven, in order to our being reduced from irregular thoughts and practices, to the wisdom of the just. *Although our carnal minds have been enmity against God, not subject to his laws nor indeed could be* i. e. while we indulged our appetites and fleshly lusts, we were in a situation directly opposite to God and goodness, *we were enemies to him by wicked works ;* and while we resolutely persisted in such irregularities, we were far from being influenced by those rules of righteousness, sobriety and godliness,



linefs, which are the result of divine favour; nor indeed *could we be subject* to those excellent directions, while we indulged ourselves in those habits which are the direct reverse. Tho' this may have been the case; *whereas we have done iniquity may we do no more.* Let this be our highest ambition, *To walk in the Spirit, and abound in those fruits of righteousness,* which are requisite in order to conduct us to infinite happiness. Who among transgressing mortals will be so arrogant as to imagine they can properly know, and rectify their hearts without divine assistance? *Who, exclusive of this, can understand his errors; be cleansed from his secret faults, or restrained from presumptuous sins.* Let a becoming sense of our inconsideration, incaution, and unavoidable imperfection in the present state, induce us to rest in nothing short of that gracious energy of the divine Spirit, which is absolutely necessary to a proper survey of the state of the mind, and our right discharge of christian duty. We are ascertained in the book of GOD, that this divine operation succeeds our best improvement of our present advantages, and exactly harmonizes with the rational exertions of the mind. *The Spirit witnesseth with our Spirit.* Our  
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just reflections and resolutions are strengthened and assisted hereby, and so are we gradually advanced to the temper and happiness of reasonable creatures. *If we seek after this wisdom, and lift up our voices for this understanding, we shall in due time understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.*

And now may GOD of his infinite mercy grant, that the blessed Spirit may so *help our infirmities* as that in due time we may be able to say, *Whereas in time past we have walked after the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the unregenerate mind, yet now we are walking, with the wise, in the ways of truth and uprightness. Having cleansed our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit we perfect holiness in the fear of GOD.*

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